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FORT LARAMIE





UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Douglas McKay, *Secretary*

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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FORT LARAMIE

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by David L. Hieb



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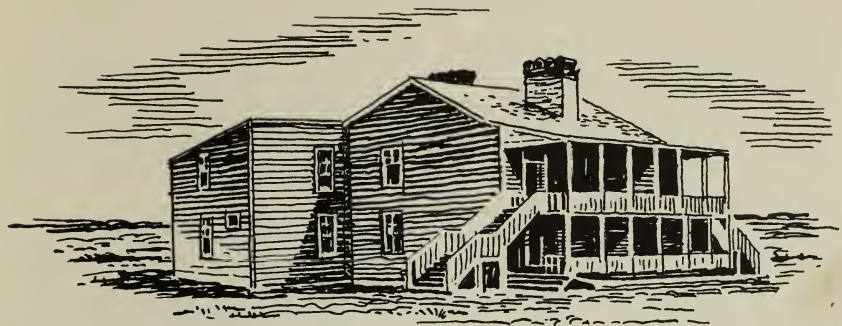
The National Park System, of which Fort Laramie National Monument is a unit, is dedicated to the conservation of America's scenic, scientific, and historic heritage for the benefit and enjoyment of the people.



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ON THE LEVEL LAND near the junction of the Laramie and North Platte Rivers stands Fort Laramie, long a landmark and symbol of the Old West. Situated at a strategic point on a natural route of travel, the site early attracted the attention of trail-blazing fur trappers, who established the first fort. In later years it offered protection and refreshment to the throngs who made the great western migrations over the Oregon Trail. It was a station for the Pony Express and the Overland Stage. It served as an important base in the conquest of the Plains Indians, and it witnessed the development of the open range cattle industry, the coming of the homesteaders, and the final settlement which marked the closing of the frontier. Perhaps no other single site is so intimately connected with the history of the Old West in all its phases.

Early Fur Trade on the Platte, 1812-30

American and French Canadian fur traders and trappers, exploring the land, traveled the North Platte Route intermittently for over two decades before the original fort was established at the mouth of the Laramie River. First to mention the well-wooded stream flowing into the North Platte River from the southwest was Robert Stuart, leader of the seven "Returning Astorians" on their path-breaking journey from Astoria at the mouth of the Columbia River to St. Louis, by way of South Pass in the Rockies and the valley of the Platte, during the winter of 1812-13. They journeyed eastward over what was to become the greatest roadway to the West, thus entitling them to recognition as the discoverers of the Oregon Trail.

Records of actual fur trade activity in this area for the next 10 years are extremely meager, but many geographical names bear witness to

Fort William, the first Fort Laramie, in 1837. From a painting by A. J. Miller. Courtesy Mrs. Clyde Porter.

the gradual westward movement of the beaver hunters, some of them undoubtedly of Canadian origin. Among them was Jacques La Ramee who, according to tradition, was killed by Indians in 1821 on the stream which now bears his name and which was destined to become the setting of Fort Laramie. Famous only in death, his name was to be given also to a plains region, a peak, a mountain range, a town, a city, and a county in Wyoming.

In 1823, Jim Bridger, Jedediah Smith, and other enterprising trappers of the Rocky Mountain Fur Co., going overland from the upper Missouri, rediscovered South Pass and the lush beaver country west of the Continental Divide. In 1824, while taking furs back to "the States," a band of "mountain men" under Thomas Fitzpatrick became the first Americans of record to pass the mouth of the Laramie after the Astorians. For 15 years thereafter the St. Louis traders sent supply trains up the North Platte route to the annual trappers' rendezvous, usually held in the valleys of the Green or Wind Rivers. In 1830, William Sublette, with supplies for the rendezvous on the Wind River, took the first wagons over the greater part of what was to become the Oregon Trail.

The Laramie and its tributaries were also the homes of the prized beaver, and much trading was done at the pleasant campsites near its mouth. Here, too, was the junction with the trappers' trail to Taos.

The Interior of Fort William in 1837. From a painting by A. J. Miller in the Walter's Art Gallery.



Fort William, the First "Fort Laramie," 1834

The advantages of the site were readily apparent to William Sublette and Robert Campbell, when, in 1834, they paused en route to the annual trappers' rendezvous to launch construction of log-stockaded Fort William. This fort, named for Sublette, was the first fort on the Laramie.

In 1835, Sublette and Campbell sold Fort William to Jim Bridger, Thomas Fitzpatrick, and Milton Sublette, and a year later these men in turn sold their interests to the monopolistic American Fur Co. (after 1838, known officially as Pierre Chouteau, Jr. and Company).

Rev. Samuel Parker and Dr. Marcus Whitman, early missionaries to Oregon, traveling with a company of fur traders, paused at "the fort of the Black Hills" in July 1835. Reverend Parker has left a vivid description of activities at the fort, including near-fatal fights between drunken trappers, a council with the chiefs of 2,000 Oglala Sioux gathered at the fort to trade, and a buffalo dance, regarding which Parker commented, "I cannot say I was much amused to see how well they could imitate brute beasts, while ignorant of God and salvation. . . ."

Marcus Whitman again traveled westward in 1836 with a fur traders' caravan, this time accompanied by his bride and Rev. and Mrs. Henry H. Spalding. The ladies, the first to travel the Oregon Trail, were extended all possible hospitality at Fort William. Especially remembered were chairs with buffalo skin bottoms, no doubt a most welcome change from the ordeal of saddle or wagon box.

To an artist, A. J. Miller, who traveled with Sir William Drummond Stewart, we are indebted for the only known pictures of Fort William. Made during his visit to the fort in 1837, these paintings depict a typical log stockade which Miller's notes describe further as being

of a quadrangular form, with block houses at diagonal corners to sweep the fronts in case of attack. Over the front entrance is a large blockhouse in which is placed a cannon. The interior of the fort is about 150 feet square, surrounded by small cabins whose roofs reach within 3 feet of the top of the palisades against which they abut. The Indians encamp in great numbers here 3 or 4 times a year, bringing peltries to be exchanged for dry goods, tobacco, beads and alcohol. The Indians have a mortal horror of the "big gun" which rests in the blockhouse, as they have had experience of its prowess and witnessed the havoc produced by its loud "talk". They conceive it to be only asleep and have a wholesome dread of its being waked up.

The fur traders came to be more and more dependent upon the fort on the Laramie as a base of supplies and a refuge in time of trouble. Similarly, early travelers and missionaries found it a most welcome haven in the wilderness. In 1840, the famous Father de Smet paused at this "Fort La Ramee" where he was favorably impressed by a village of Cheyennes.

Fort Platte and Fort John on the Laramie

Late in 1840 or early in 1841, a rival trading post appeared. This was Fort Platte, built of adobe on the nearby banks of the North Platte River by L. P. Lupton, a veteran of the fur trade in what is now Colorado, but later operated by at least two other independent trading companies.

Abandonment of the rendezvous system after 1840 increased the importance of fixed trading posts. The deterioration of Fort William prompted the American Fur Co. to replace it in 1841 with a more pretentious adobe-walled post which cost some \$10,000. Christened Fort John, presumably after John Sarpy, a stockholder, the new fort, like its predecessor, was popularly known as "Fort Laramie."

Competition in the declining fur trade led to open traffic in "fire-water," and the debauchery of the Indians around Forts Platte and Laramie was noted by many travelers of the early 1840's. Rufus B. Sage vividly describes the carousals of one band of Indians which ended with the death and burial of a Brule chief. In a state of drunkenness, this unfortunate merry-maker fell from his horse and broke his neck while racing from Fort Laramie to Fort Platte.

Trade goods for the rival posts came out in wagons over the Platte Valley road from St. Joseph or over the trail from Fort Pierre on the upper Missouri. On the return trip, packs of buffalo robes and furs were sent down to St. Louis. In addition to wagon transportation, cargoes were sent by boat down the fickle Platte, which often dried up and left the boatmen stranded on sandbars in the middle of Nebraska.

The First Emigrants

Up to 1840, traders, adventurers, and missionaries dominated the scene. The first party of true covered-wagon emigrants, whose experiences were recorded by John Bidwell and Joseph Williams, paused at Fort Laramie in 1841. The following year Lt. John C. Fremont visited the fort on his first exploring trip to the Rocky Mountains. Recognizing its strategic location and foreseeing the covered-wagon migrations, Fremont added his voice to those recommending the establishment of a military post at the site.

In 1843, the "cow column," first of the great migrations to Oregon, reached the fort under the guidance of Marcus Whitman. This group numbered nearly 1,000 persons. Thereafter, the emigrants with their covered wagons became a familiar sight each May and June. Impressions of the swift-flowing Laramie River, the white-walled fort, the populous Indian tepee villages, the "squawmen" at the fort, and the dances held on level ground beneath nearby cottonwoods were frequently recorded by diarists.

More than 3,000 Oregon-bound emigrants paused at the fort in 1845, intermingling peacefully with the numerous Sioux Indians encamped there. Later that summer, peace still prevailed when Col. Stephen Watts Kearny arrived with five companies of the First Dragoons, encamped on the grassy Laramie River bottoms, and held a formal council with the Indians between the two forts. Here the Indians were warned against drinking "Taos Lightning" or disturbing the emigrants and were assured of the love and solicitude of the Great White Father. They were also duly impressed with his power as symbolized in a display of howitzer fire and rockets.

While Fort Platte was abandoned by its owners in 1845, trade was brisk at Fort Laramie during the winter of 1845-46, and it is recorded that during the following spring a little fleet of Mackinaw boats, under the leadership of the veteran factor P. D. Papin, successfully navigated the Platte with 1,100 packs of buffalo robes, 110 packs of beaver, and 3 packs of bear and wolf skins. Thus, it was a moderately prosperous Fort Laramie in the waning days of the fur trade which the young historian Francis Parkman visited in the spring of 1846 and described so vividly in his book *The Oregon Trail*:

Fort Laramie is one of the posts established by the American Fur Company, which well-nigh monopolizes the Indian trade of this region. Prices are most extortionate: sugar, two dollars a cup; five-cent tobacco at a dollar and a half; bullets at seventy-five cents a pound. The company is exceedingly disliked in this country; it suppresses all opposition and, keeping up these enormous prices, pays its men in necessities on these terms. Here its officials rule with an absolute sway; the arm of the United States has little force, for when we were there the extreme outposts of her troops were about seven hundred miles to the eastward. The little fort is built of bricks dried in the sun, and externally is of an oblong form, with bastions of clay in the form of ordinary blockhouses at two of the corners. The walls are about fifteen feet high, and surmounted by a slender palisade. The roofs of the apartments within, which are built close against the walls, serve the purpose of banquette. Within, the fort is divided by a partition: on one side is the square area, surrounded by the storerooms, offices, and apartments of the inmates; on the other is the corral, a narrow place encompassed by the high clay walls, where at night or in the presence of dangerous Indians the horses and mules of the fort are crowded for safekeeping. The main entrance has two gates with an arched passage intervening. A little square window, high above the ground, opens laterally from an adjoining chamber into this passage; so that, when the inner gate is closed and barred, a person without may still hold communication with those within through this narrow aperture. This obviates the necessity of admitting suspicious Indians for purposes of trading into the body of the fort, for when danger is apprehended the inner gate is shut fast, and all traffic is carried on by means of the window. This precaution, though necessary at some of the company's posts, is seldom resorted to at Fort Laramie, where, though men are frequently killed in the neighborhood, no apprehensions are felt of any general designs of hostility from the Indians.

While here, Parkman also witnessed the arrival of the Donner party, who paused at the fort to celebrate the Fourth of July. Many of this party later met a tragic fate in the snow-locked passes of the Sierras.

The Mormon Migrations, 1847-48

While many of the early visitors to Fort Laramie were missionaries, mass emigration motivated by religion was not in evidence until 1847. That spring the pioneer band of Mormons, led by Brigham Young, passed up the north bank of the Platte to its confluence with the Laramie, and crossed near the ruins of Fort Platte. They paused there for a few days to repair wagons and record for future emigrants the facilities available at Fort Laramie, of which James Bordeaux was then in charge. This party of 143 men, 3 women, and 2 children seeking a new Zion in the Salt Lake Valley were but pathbreakers for more than 4,000 Mormons who almost monopolized the trail in 1848.

Like emigrants of all sects, the Mormons enjoyed a respite from travel on arrival at the great way station of Fort Laramie. A variety of activities engaged the emigrants during their brief stopover. Men engaged in blacksmithing and general repair, traded at the fort, or went fishing. The women busied themselves with washing and baking or gathered chokecherries or currants.

The Mormons at this time conceived a plan which was used for several years at Fort Laramie. Wagon supply trains from Utah, drawn by teams acclimated to mountain travel, met emigrating "Saints" from the East, and teams were exchanged. Thus, they avoided the serious losses of stock often resulting when tired low-country teams encountered the high altitudes of South Pass and the rough mountain trails into Utah.

Meanwhile, despite a moderately brisk business with the emigrants, trading at Fort Laramie continued to suffer from the general decline of the fur market and the competition of independent dealers in "Taos Lightning." Conditions were now ripe for the early retirement of the American Fur Co.

Fort Laramie Becomes a Military Post

For some years the Government had considered establishing military posts along the Oregon Trail for the protection of emigrants, and this site at the mouth of the Laramie had often been recommended. In December 1845, such action was proposed by President Polk and in May 1846 the Congress approved "An Act to provide for raising a regiment of Mounted Riflemen, and for establishing military stations on the route to Oregon." Funds were provided to mount and equip the troops, to defray the expenses of each station, and to compensate the Indian tribes on whose lands these stations might be erected.

The Mexican War delayed the projected building of forts on the Oregon Trail, but in 1847 a battalion of Missouri Mounted Volunteers was recruited. Early in 1848 this battalion established Fort Kearny, the first of the posts on the trail, on the south bank of the Platte near the head of Grand Island. In November, they were mustered out, being relieved by the Mounted Riflemen.

During the following winter the news of the discovery of gold in California was published throughout the land, and the resulting fevered preparations to trek westward the next spring increased the urgency of completing the chain of forts.

In March, United States Adj. Gen. Roger Jones directed Gen. D. E. Triggs at St. Louis to carry out establishment of the second post "at or near Fort Laramie, a trading station belonging to the American Fur Company." Lt. Daniel P. Woodbury, of the Corps of Engineers, was authorized to purchase the buildings of Fort Laramie "should he deem it necessary to do so." Companies A and E, Mounted Riflemen, and Company G, Sixth Infantry, were designated as the first garrison of the new post with Maj. W. F. Sanderson, Mounted Riflemen, in command.

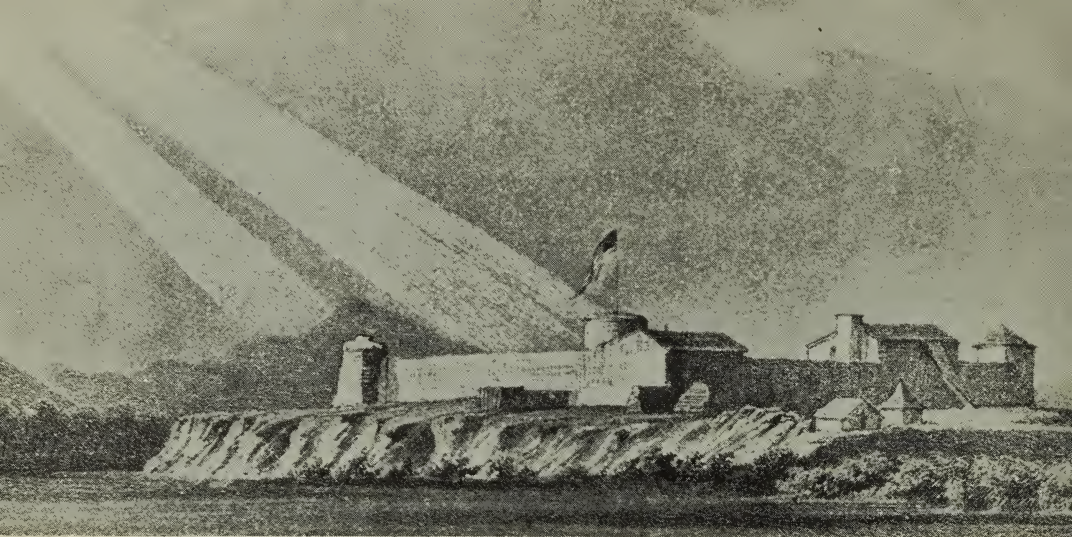
Major Sanderson with 4 officers and 58 men of Company E, Mounted Riflemen, left Fort Leavenworth early in May and arrived at the Laramie on June 16 without incident. On June 27 he wrote to the adjutant general reporting that after making a thorough reconnaissance of the neighborhood he had found this to be the most eligible site and that at his request Lieutenant Woodbury had, on June 26, purchased Fort Laramie from Bruce Husband, agent of the American Fur Co., for \$4,000. He reported further that good pine timber, limestone, hay, and dry wood were readily available and that the Laramie River furnished abundant good water for the command.

Company C, Mounted Rifles, consisting of 2 officers and 60 men, arrived at the post on July 26, and on August 12 the 2 officers and 53 men of Company G, Sixth Infantry, completed the garrison and joined in the work of preparing additional quarters.

The California Gold Rush

Meanwhile, these troops had been preceded, accompanied, and followed over the trail by some 30,000 goldseekers bound for California, a few thousand Mormons en route to Utah, and additional troops of Mounted Riflemen pushing west to establish a post at Fort Hall in Idaho.

Many of those who trekked westward from the Missouri did not even reach Fort Laramie. The dread Asiatic cholera took a terrible toll along the banks of the Platte. Fresh graves, averaging one and a half



Fort Laramie in 1849. From An Expedition to the Valley of the Great Salt Lake of Utah by Howard Stansbury.

to the mile, marked the 700-mile trail from Westport Landing to the Laramie. Beyond Fort Laramie the ravages of disease abated, but already many trains were short of men and stock. These conditions and the rougher roads ahead frequently forced the abandonment of wagons, personal property, and stocks of provisions. However, not all of the westward surging throng reached Fort Laramie with surplus supplies. Many were thankful to be able to replenish dwindling supplies at the commissary as well as to obtain fresh draft animals, repair failing wagons, and mail letters to "the States."

While purchase of the adobe trading post provided the Army with a measure of shelter for men and supplies, it was far from adequate. In late June 1849, Major Sanderson reported that the entire command was already employed in cutting and hauling timber and burning lime. Stone was also quarried and a horse-powered sawmill placed in operation. By winter, a two-storied block of officers' quarters (to become known as "Old Bedlam"), a block of soldiers' quarters, a bakery, and two stables had been pushed near enough completion to be occupied.

That winter was mild and uneventful at Fort Laramie, but by early May 1850 the high tide of westward migration began. Goldseekers and homeseekers bound for California, Oregon, or Utah thronged the trails on both sides of the Platte and converged on the fort, where, by August 14, a record had been made of 39,506 men, 2,421 women, 2,609 children, 9,927 wagons, and proportionate numbers of livestock. Also, 316 deaths en route were recorded, for cholera again raged along the trail in Nebraska. The graves along the trail east of Fort Laramie were only outnumbered by the bodies of dead draft animals and piles of abandoned property westward toward South Pass.

Meager blacksmithing and repair facilities were available to the emigrants at Fort Laramie. Supplies could be purchased at the commissary and at the sutler's store, whose adobe walls were first noted that year. The sutler, John S. Tutt, also had brisk competition from numerous oldtime mountain men who set up shop along the trails nearby.

The post commander reported further progress in new construction during 1850. The stonewalled magazine was probably completed that year, "Old Bedlam" neared completion, and a two-storied barracks was begun. Lured by gold, however, troops as well as civilian artisans deserted the post to such an extent that Mexican labor was imported for building and experimental farming.

In 1851, the gold fever subsided somewhat, but Mormon emigrations increased and in all probability 20,000 emigrants trekked westward past the fort. Cholera was not epidemic and emigration was less eventful, but the fort was busy preparing to play host to other visitors.

The Fort Laramie Treaty Council, 1851

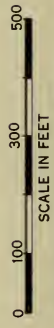
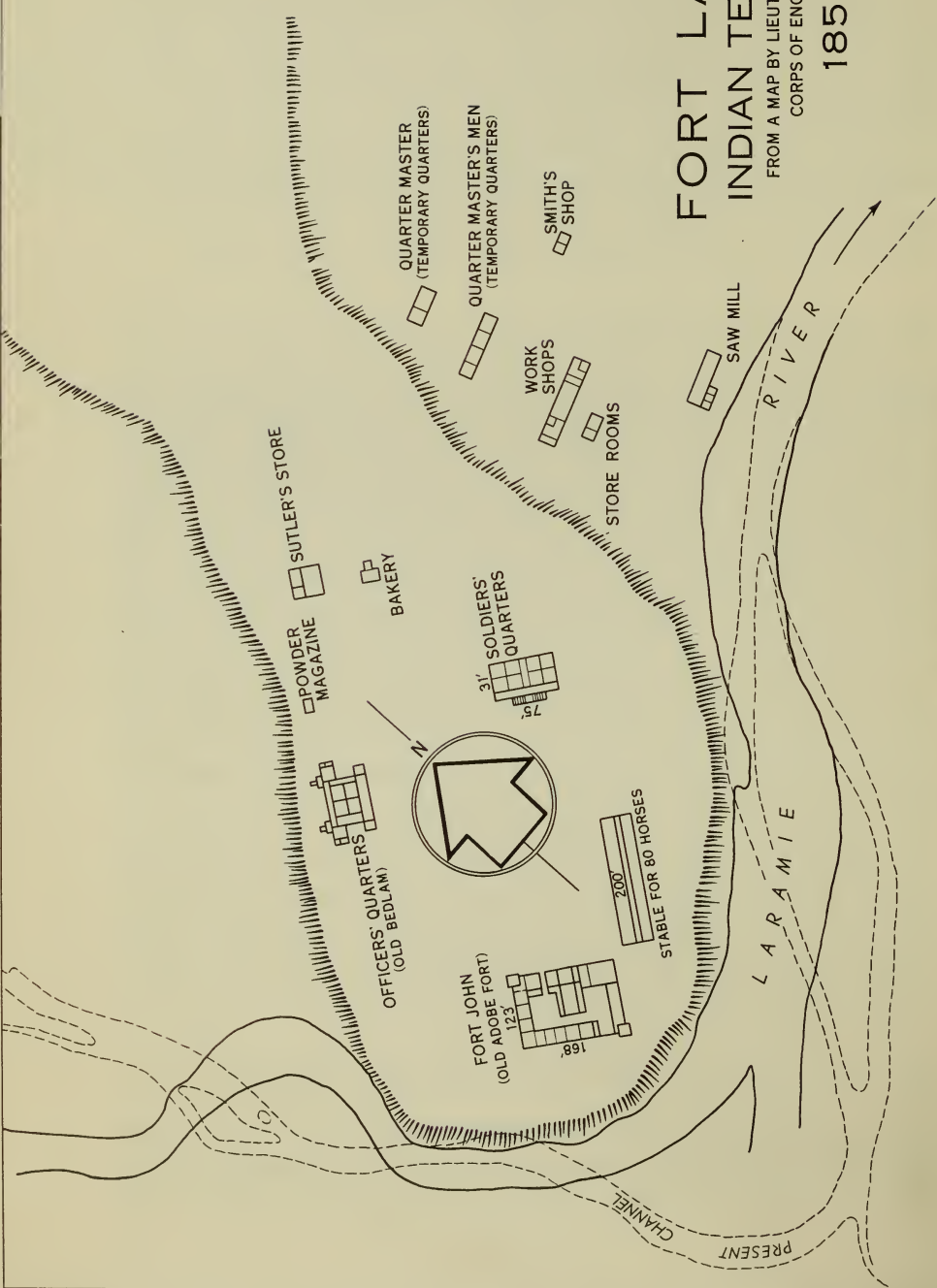
Early in 1851, the Congress had authorized holding a great treaty council with the Plains Indians to assure peaceful relations along the trails to the West. D. D. Mitchell and Thomas Fitzpatrick, the commissioners, chose Fort Laramie as the meeting place and summoned the various Indian tribes to come in by September 1. For days before that date, Indians gathered at the fort. The Sioux, Cheyennes, and Arapahoes mingled freely, but tension mounted as their enemies, the Snakes and Crows, made their appearance. Peace prevailed, however, and the sole major difficulties were a grazing problem and the late arrival of a wagon train of gifts. The countless ponies accompanying 10,000 Indians required so much forage that the vast assemblage had to move to the meadows at the mouth of Horse Creek, 30 miles east of the fort. Chiefs representing many other tribes arrived. Parades of Indian hordes in full array were held, speeches made, presents distributed, the pipe of peace smoked, and by September 17 it had been agreed that peace should reign among the red men and between them and the whites. The white men were to be free to travel the roads and hold their scattered forts, and the Indians were to receive an annuity of \$50,000 in goods each year. The council was considered a great success and gave promise of a lasting peace on the plains.

The Emigrant Tide and Indian Troubles, 1852-53

In 1852, the emigrant tide again swelled to nearly 40,000, over 10,000 of which were Mormons. The emigrants were encouraged to depend on supplies available at Fort Laramie and other posts along

FORT LARAMIE INDIAN TERRITORY

FROM A MAP BY LIEUT. A. J. DOWLSON
CORPS OF ENGINEERS
1851



the trail. A toll bridge over the Laramie River, a mile below the fort, eliminated one obstacle on the trail, and disease took a much lighter toll of lives.

Beginning in 1850, many of the emigrants on the north bank, or Mormon Trail, stopped crossing to the south bank trail at Fort Laramie and followed a rough, but shorter, route westward along the north side of the river. Those who did not cross with their wagons, however, still found the old ferry across the North Platte a welcome means of visiting the fort for mail and supplies. In 1853, this ferry figured in the first serious Indian trouble near the fort.

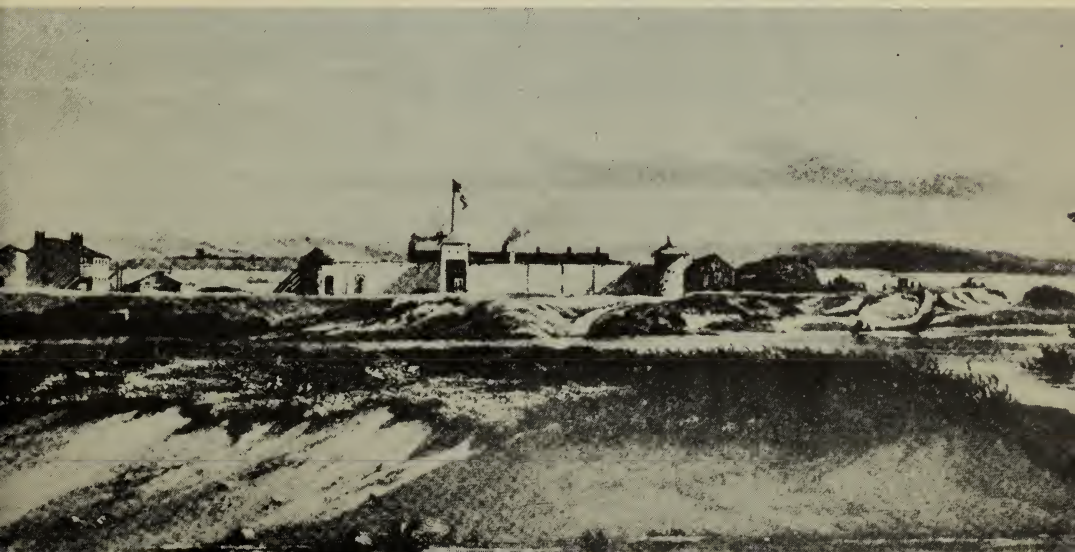
The Sioux were becoming alarmed by the great numbers of whites using the Oregon Trail, with resulting destruction of game, and the ravages of new diseases among the tribes. On June 15, a group of Sioux seized the ferry boat, and one of them fired on Sergeant Raymond, who recaptured it. Lt. H. B. Fleming and 23 men were dispatched to the Indian village to arrest the offender. The Indians refused to give up the culprit and fired on the soldiers. In the resulting skirmish, 3 Indians were killed, 3 wounded, and 2 taken prisoner. The Miniconjou Sioux were incensed by this action, but after a full explanation by Capt. R. Garnett, commander of the fort, they accepted their annuities from the Indian agent and no further hostilities resulted that year.

In spite of this incident and considerable begging and thievery by Indians, the emigrants had been in little real danger of Indian attack. All this was changed by an unfortunate occurrence late in the summer of 1854.

The Grattan and Harney Massacres, 1854-55

Until August 18, summer emigration in 1854 appears to have been unaffected by trouble with the Indians. On that day a Mormon cara-

Fort Laramie in 1853. From a sketch by Frederick Piercy.



van passed a village of Brule Sioux 8 miles east of Fort Laramie, and a cow ran into the village where it was appropriated by a visiting Miniconjou brave. This matter was reported at the fort by both the Mormons and the chief of the Brules. Lt. John Grattan, Sixth Infantry, with 29 soldiers, 2 cannon, and an interpreter, was dispatched to the village to arrest the offending Indian. Unfortunately, the interpreter was drunk and the young officer was arrogant. The Indian offender refused to give himself up and a fight was precipitated in the Indian village, resulting in the annihilation of the military party.

The enraged Indians then pillaged Bordeaux's nearby trading post and helped themselves to both annuity goods and company property at the American Fur Co.'s post 3 miles up the river. Fortunately, no attack was made on the small remaining garrison of Fort Laramie to which neighboring traders and others rushed for protection. All Sioux immediately left the vicinity of the fort, and the Cheyennes and Arapahoes waited only for the distribution of treaty goods before moving away.

During the following year, Indians committed many small-scale depredations along the Oregon Trail. However, despite greatly exaggerated alarms, the emigrants of 1855 were for the most part unmolested. Meanwhile, the Army had become convinced that the Indians must be punished, and a force of 600 men under Gen. W. S. Harney marched westward from Fort Leavenworth. The Indian agent at Fort Laramie warned all friendly Indians to come to the south side of the Platte—a warning heeded by many bands. On September 2, General Harney arrived at Ash Hollow, 150 miles below Fort Laramie, and located Little Thunder's band of Brule Sioux some 6 miles north on the Blue Water. Early the next morning, after rejecting protestations of friendship by Little Thunder, his troops attacked the village from two sides, killing 86 Indians and capturing an almost equal number of women and children. At Fort Laramie, General Harney issued a stern warning to other Sioux bands, then proceeded overland through Sioux territory to establish a military post at Fort Pierre on the upper Missouri River.

Handcart to Pony Express, 1856-61

In 1856, in an effort to reduce the cost of emigration to Utah, the Mormons introduced the handcart plan. Two-wheeled handcarts, similar to those once used by street sweepers, were constructed of Iowa hickory and oak. One cart was assigned to each four or five converts who walked and pushed or pulled their carts over the long trek from the railhead at Iowa City to the Salt Lake Valley. Livestock was driven with the parties and at times 1 ox-drawn wagon to each 100 emigrants was provided to carry additional baggage and supplies.

The first handcart parties were very successful, but the last two, in 1856, started too late in the summer and were snowed in near Devil's Gate. There, more than 200 of the 1,000 or more in the two parties perished from cold and hunger before the survivors could be rescued by wagon trains sent out from Utah. From 1856 to 1860 some 3,000 Mormons made the journey to Utah in 10 handcart companies, and to these footsore travelers Fort Laramie was indeed a haven in the wilderness.

Early in 1857, the War Department decided to abandon Fort Laramie, but events forced the cancellation of the order before it could be carried out, and the fort again demonstrated its strategic importance. First, it served as a supply base for a punitive expedition led by Col. E. V. Sumner against the Cheyennes between the Platte and Arkansas Rivers. Then, as that campaign drew to an inconclusive end, the fort became a vital base for the Army which marched toward Utah that fall to subdue the reportedly rebellious Mormons.

By the next year, the Utah Campaign involved some 6,000 troops, half of whom were in or near Utah, with Fort Laramie their nearest sure source of supply.

In spite of this warlike activity, thousands of emigrants continued to roll westward by covered wagon, the great travel medium of the plains. To these the fort was a vital way station, as it was to the great firm of Russell, Majors, and Waddell, freighting contractors who carried supplies to the Army in Utah. In 1858, this enterprise alone involved 3,500 wagons, 40,000 oxen, 1,000 mules, and 4,000 men.

Beginning in 1850, mail service of varying frequency and reliability linked Fort Laramie with the States to the east and Salt Lake City to the west. Interrupted in the summer of 1857 by the Utah Campaign, a new and improved weekly mail service was organized in 1858 bringing news only 12 days old from the Missouri River to the fort.

In 1858, the discovery of gold at Cherry Creek, 200 miles south of Fort Laramie, precipitated the Colorado gold rush. That winter Fort Laramie was the nearest link between the gold miners clustered about the site of Denver, Colo., and the outside world. An informal mail express to the fort was organized and carried by old trappers.

These developments were soon overshadowed by the spectacular pony express. The first westbound rider galloped into Fort Laramie on April 6, 1860, just 3 days out from St. Joseph, Mo. This remarkable system of relays of riders and ponies carried up to 10 pounds of mail from St. Joseph to San Francisco in 13 days, at the rate of \$5 in gold for a half-ounce letter. Later, a Government subsidy, begun on July 1, 1861, reduced the rate to \$1 for one-half ounce. On that same date daily overland mail coaches began operating from St. Joseph to San Francisco, via Fort Laramie, on an 18-day schedule.

Meanwhile, the poles and wires of the first transcontinental telegraph were stretching out across the plains and mountains. Reaching

Fort Laramie in September, the telegraph was completed to Salt Lake City and connected with the line from the west coast on October 24, 1861. That date also marked the end of the pony express which, although a financial failure that cost W. H. Russell his fortune, had proved the practicability of the central route to California for year-round travel.

The Civil War and the Uprising of the Plains Indians

The outbreak of the Civil War led to the reduction of garrisons at all outposts. This, coupled with a bloody uprising of the Sioux in Minnesota in 1862, inspired the Plains Indians, nursing many grievances, to go on the warpath. In the spring of 1862, many stage stations along the Platte route were raided and burned. To meet this threat, volunteer cavalry from Utah rushed east to the South Pass area, and the Eleventh Ohio Volunteer Cavalry under Col. Wm. O. Collins was ordered west to Fort Laramie. These raids also prompted the moving of the overland mail and stage route south to the Overland Trail and the establishment of Fort Halleck 120 miles to the southwest. During this period, troops at Fort Laramie continued to protect the vital telegraph line through South Pass and a still considerable volume of travelers, principally to Utah.

The next winter was fairly peaceful at Fort Laramie, and of social life at the post young Caspar Collins wrote to his mother: "They make the soldiers wear white gloves at this post, and they cut around very fashionably. A good many of the regulars are married and have their wives and families with them." He also indicated that they had a circulating library, a band, amateur theatricals, and an occasional ball. However, the dangers of the frontier were ever present, and, later that winter, troops en route from Fort Laramie to Fort Halleck encountered weather so severe that several were frozen to death.

Indians continued to steal horses from the overland mail stations, freighters, and ranchers; and incidents provoked by both whites and Indians piled up until the whole region was in a state of alarm. Efforts were made to call the Indians into the forts to treat for peace, but with little success.

At this time the difficulty of detecting the movements of Indian war parties was demonstrated at Fort Laramie. Returning from a 3-day scout, without finding a sign of hostile Indians, a large detachment of troops unsaddled their horses and let them roll on the parade grounds. Suddenly, at midday, a daring party of 30 warriors dashed through the fort, drove the horses off to the north and escaped, with all but the poorest animals, despite a 48-hour pursuit. The fort's commander, Major Wood, was described by his adjutant as "the maddest man I ever saw."



Fort Laramie in 1863. Note "Old Bedlam" to the right of the flagpole. From a sketch in the University of Wyoming Archives by Bugler C. Moellman, 11th Ohio Volunteer Cavalry.

Later in 1864, after another attempt to make peace with the northern Indians had failed, Gen. R. B. Mitchell ordered the strengthening of the defenses along the road to South Pass. Several former stage and pony express stations were strengthened and garrisoned. Fort Sedgwick, near Julesburg, and Fort Mitchell, at Scottsbluff, were among those established. Fort Laramie became headquarters of a district extending from South Pass east to Mud Springs Station. Meanwhile, Indian raids along the South Platte River virtually cut off Denver from the east for 6 weeks.

Continuing efforts to seek peace with the Indians were made unsuccessful by the Sand Creek Massacre in November 1864, which united the southern bands of Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapahoe on the warpath. Early in January 1865, they raided Julesburg, sacking the station, carrying off great quantities of foodstuffs, and almost succeeding in destroying the garrison of Fort Sedgwick. Efforts to burn out the Indians by setting a 300-mile-wide prairie fire brought them swarming back to the attack, destroying the South Platte road stations and miles of telegraph line, sacking and burning Julesburg a second time, and driving off great herds of livestock. While troops from Fort Laramie arrived at Mud Springs Station in time to fight off the Indians there, all efforts by troops from Fort Laramie and the east failed to prevent the Indians from escaping with their booty across the North Platte, near Ash Hollow.

Termination of the Civil War in April 1865 released many troops for service against the Indians, and plans were laid for extensive punitive expeditions, especially in the country to the north of the North Platte River.

In May, the fort's commander, Col. Thomas Moonlight, led 500 cavalymen on a 450-mile foray into the Wind River Valley, but failed to find the Indians. Meanwhile, there were several raids on stations westward to South Pass. An effort to move a village of friendly Brules from Fort Laramie to Fort Kearny resulted in a fight at Horse Creek where Captain Fouts and four soldiers were killed as these Indians escaped to join the hostiles. In pursuing them, all of Colonel Moonlight's horses were stolen, and he returned to Fort Laramie in disgrace.

The major Indian raids of the summer centered on Platte Bridge Station, 130 miles above Fort Laramie, where late in July a large force of Indians wiped out a wagon train and killed 26 white men, including Lt. Caspar Collins who led a small party from the station in a valiant rescue effort.

In the meantime, a great campaign against the Indians, known as the Powder River Expedition, got under way with 2,500 men, directed by Gen. R. E. Connor. Of three columns planned to converge on the Indians in the Powder River country, the first, under Colonel Cole, started from Omaha, marched up the Loup River Valley, thence east of the Black Hills and on to the Powder River in Montana. The second, under Lieutenant Colonel Walker, left Fort Laramie, marched north along the west side of the Black Hills, and joined Colonel Cole's column as planned. The third, under General Connor, marched about 100 miles up the Platte from Fort Laramie, then north to the headwaters

Group on the porch of "Old Bedlam" in 1864.
Courtesy Newberry Library.



of Powder River where a small fort, Camp Connor, was established; thence, down the Powder River, where he destroyed the village and supplies of a large band of Arapahoes, but failed to meet the other two columns. The other commanders, lacking adequate supplies and proper knowledge of the country, lost most of their horses and mules in a September storm and, beset by fast-riding Indians, were forced to destroy the bulk of their heavy equipment. They were finally found and led to Camp Connor just in time to prevent heavy losses by starvation and possible destruction by Indians. The expedition straggled back to Fort Laramie, a failure.

Peace Talk and War on the Bozeman Trail, 1866-68

Officials at Washington now decided to try peaceful measures with the Indians of the Fort Laramie region, and General Connor was succeeded in command by General Wheaton. Emissaries were sent to the tribes, inviting them to a general peace council at Fort Laramie in June 1866.

In March of that year, Col. Henry Maynadier, then in command at Fort Laramie, reported, as auguring success of the peace council, that Spotted Tail, head chief of the Brule Sioux, had brought in the body of his daughter for burial among the whites at Fort Laramie. Her name was Ah-ho-ap-pa, which is Sioux for wheat flour, although modern poets have referred to her as Fallen Leaf. In the summer of 1864, she was a familiar figure at Fort Laramie. While she haughtily refused the crackers, coffee, and bacon doled out to the Indian women and children at that time, she spent long hours on a bench by the sutler's store watching the white man's way of life. She was particularly fond of watching the guard mount and the dress parade, and the officer in charge was often especially decked out in sash and plumes for her benefit. She refused to marry one of her own people, attempted to learn English, and told her people they were fools for not living in houses and making peace with the whites. When the Sioux went on the warpath in 1864, however, Spotted Tail and his daughter were with them and spent the next year in the Powder River country. There the hard life weakened her, and she sickened and died during the following cold winter.

Having promised to carry out her express wish to be buried at Fort Laramie, her father led the funeral procession on a journey of 260 miles. Colonel Maynadier responded gallantly to Spotted Tail's request. In a ceremony which combined all the pageantry of the military and the primitive tradition of the Sioux, her body was placed in a coffin on a raised platform a half mile north of the parade grounds. Thus, a long step had been taken toward winning the friendship of a great chief.



The grave of Spotted Tail's daughter near Fort Laramie, about 1881. Courtesy Wyoming Historical Department.

By June, a good representation of Brule and Oglala Sioux being present, the commissioners set about negotiating a treaty. In the meantime, unfortunately, the War Department sent out an expedition instructed to open the Bozeman Trail through the Powder River country to the Montana gold mines. Colonel Carrington and his troops arrived at Fort Laramie in the midst of the negotiations and caused serious unrest among the Indians. One chief commented, "Great Father send us presents and wants new road, but white chief goes with

Fort Laramie in 1867. From a sketch by Anton Schoenborn.



soldiers to steal road before Indian say yes or no," and a large faction, led by Red Cloud and Man-Afraid-of-His-Horses, withdrew in open opposition to all peace talk. Nevertheless, the remaining Indians agreed to a treaty which provided for the opening of the Bozeman Trail.

In late June the troops under Colonel Carrington marched up the trail, garrisoned Camp Connor (later moved and named Fort Reno), and began building Fort Phil Kearny at the foot of the Bighorn Mountains and Fort C. F. Smith farther north in Montana. Immediately, it became evident that the peace treaty was meaningless. Fort Phil Kearny was the scene of almost daily Indian attacks on traders, wagon trains, wood-cutting parties, and troops. These attacks were climaxed on December 21 when Capt. William Fetterman and 80 men were led into an ambush and annihilated by Indians led by Crazy Horse and Red Cloud. The fort and its remaining garrison were in danger of being overwhelmed, and the nearest aid lay at Fort Laramie, 236 miles away. At midnight, John "Portugee" Phillips, trader and scout, slipped out into a blizzard on the colonel's favorite horse and in 4 days made his way across the storm-swept, Indian-infested plains to Fort Laramie in one of the truly heroic rides of American history. While his gallant mount lay dying on the parade ground, Phillips interrupted a gay Christmas night party in "Old Bedlam" to deliver his message, and a relief expedition was soon on its way.

The severe weather made an attempted winter campaign against the Indians unsuccessful, and there was no important fighting until summer. On August 2, 1867, the Indians again attacked a woodcutting party near Fort Phil Kearny, but the small detachment led by Captain Powell was armed with the new 1866 Springfield breech-loading rifles and fought off repeated charges by the Indians in the famous Wagon Box Fight.

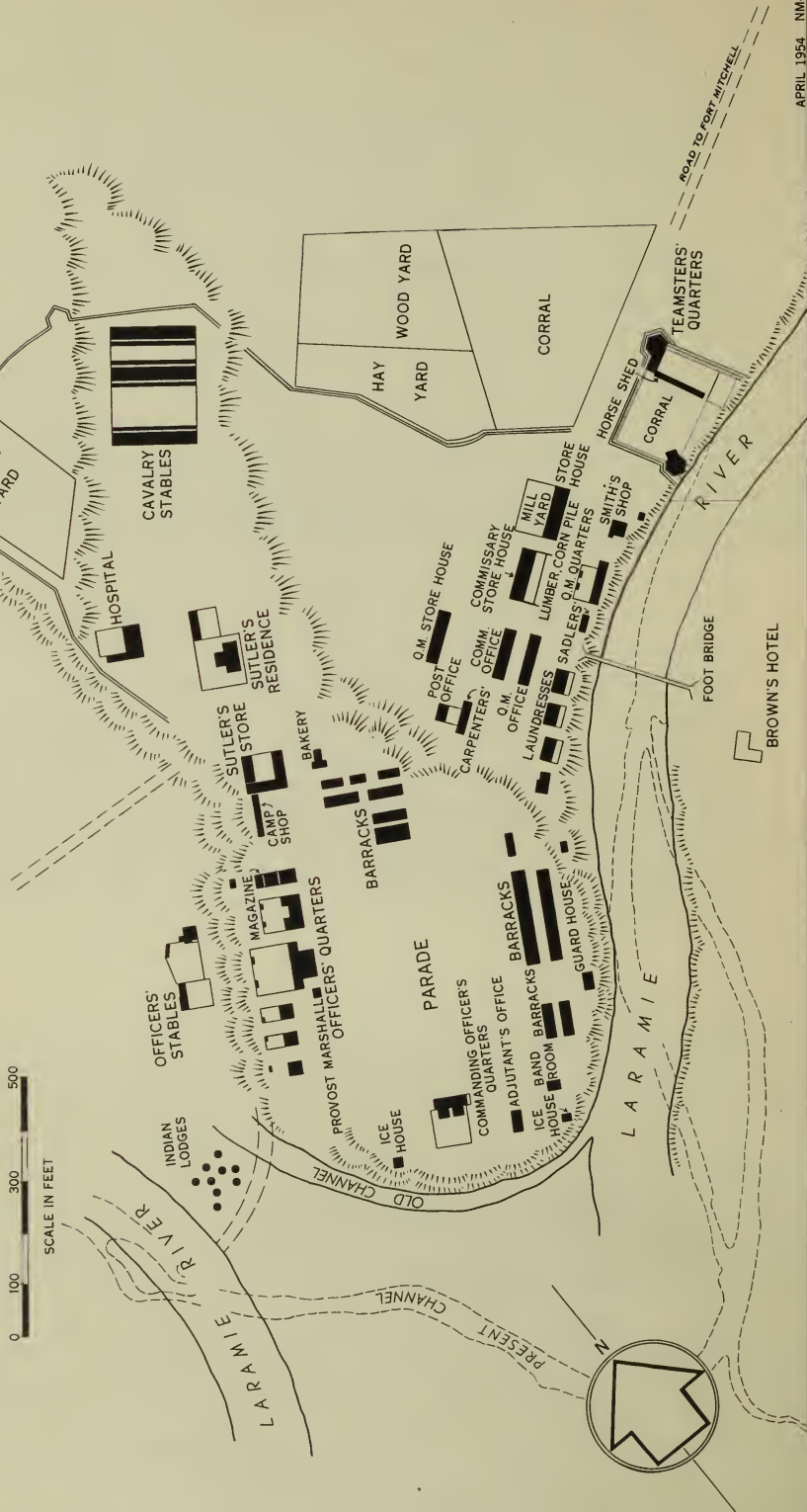
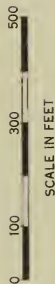


FORT LARAMIE

GENERAL PLAN

(FROM AN OLD MAP)

1867



The Treaty of 1868

Again, the peace advocates in Washington were in the ascendancy, and in the summer of 1867 the Congress provided a commission to treat with the Indians, but authorized recruiting an army of 4,000 men if peace was not attained. Treaties with the southern tribes were concluded at Fort Larned in October, and the commissioners came to Fort Laramie in November to treat with the northern tribes. However, few came in and the hostiles, led by Red Cloud, sent word that no treaty was possible until the forts on the Bozeman Trail and in the valley of the Powder River were abandoned to the Indians. They did agree to cease hostilities and to come to Fort Laramie the next spring. In April 1868, the commissioners came again to Fort Laramie and were prepared to grant the Indians' demands, including abandonment of the Bozeman Trail. By late May, both the Brule and Oglala Sioux had signed the treaty, but Red Cloud refused to sign until the troops had left the Powder River country and his warriors had burned the abandoned Fort Phil Kearny to the ground.

This treaty gave the Indians all of what is now South Dakota west of

The Peace Commissioners in council with Indians at Fort Laramie in 1868. From a photograph by Alexander Gardner in the Newberry Library.





Indians at the North Platte Ferry in 1868. From a photograph by Alexander Gardner in the Newberry Library.

the Missouri River as a reservation. It also gave them control and hunting rights in the great territory north of the North Platte River and east of the Bighorn Mountains as unceded Indian lands. The Indian agencies were to be built on the Missouri River. Many of the Indians, however, objected to giving up trading at Fort Laramie as had been their custom, and, in 1870, a temporary agency for Red Cloud's band was established on the North Platte River 30 miles below the fort, at the present Nebraska-Wyoming line. Finally, in 1873, after he and other chiefs had twice been taken to Washington and New York to view the numbers and power of the white man, Red Cloud agreed to

Dress parade at Fort Laramie in 1868. Note "Old Bedlam" at the extreme right





Indians and whites at Fort Laramie in 1868. From a photograph by Alexander Gardner in the Newberry Library.

having his agency moved north to a site on White River away from Fort Laramie and the Platte Road.

In the meantime, peace prevailed on the high plains, and, in 1872, it was reported that not a white man was killed in the department of the Platte.

Later in 1873, however, the attitude of many Indians toward their agents at the Red Cloud and Spotted Tail agencies became so hostile that the agents requested that troops be stationed at the agencies. Although the Indians protested this as a violation of their treaty rights, Camp Robinson and Camp Sheridan were established at these respec-

From a photograph by Alexander Gardner in the Newberry Library.





Fort Laramie in 1868.

tive agencies in 1874. At the same time, funds were obtained for an iron bridge over the North Platte at Fort Laramie. Its completion, early in 1876, gave the troops there ready access to the Indian country.

The Fight for the Black Hills

Rumors of gold in the Black Hills of South Dakota had persisted for many years, which induced the Government to send an expedition under Col. George A. Custer from Fort Abraham Lincoln on the upper Missouri to investigate the area. Proceeding without opposition from the Indians, the expedition confirmed the presence of gold in the hills and sent out word of their discoveries to Fort Laramie in August 1874. The resulting rush of prospecting parties was at first forbidden by the military, who rounded up several and imprisoned some of their leaders

Fort Laramie in 1876.





U. S. Geological Survey photograph by William H. Jackson.

at Fort Laramie, while other parties were attacked by the Indians for flagrant violation of the treaty of 1868.

A second expedition, led by Col. R. I. Dodge and Prof. W. P. Jenney, set out from Fort Laramie the next spring to explore and evaluate the gold deposits in the Black Hills. Miners also thronged the hills, and efforts to make them await negotiations with the Indians were only partly successful. Meanwhile, the Government did make an effort to buy the Black Hills from the Sioux; but the Indians, led by Chief Spotted Tail, set a justly high price on the area, which the Government refused to meet. Moreover, the wild bands of Sitting Bull and other chiefs refused to sell at any price and warned the whites to stay out. No longer restrained by the Army, the miners now swarmed into the hills, which became a powder keg.

Ignoring existing treaties, the Government decided to force the wild Sioux onto their reservation, and when the order for them to come

Courtesy D. S. Mitchell.



in was not instantly complied with, the Army prepared for action. A double enveloping campaign was planned, to be led by Gen. George Crook with troops based at Fort Laramie and Fort Fetterman, and by Gen. Alfred H. Terry with Custer's Seventh Cavalry from Fort Abraham Lincoln and Col. John Gibbon's command from Fort Ellis, Mont. In March, Crook marched north from Fort Fetterman, 80 miles northwest of Fort Laramie, with 12 companies of soldiers. His cavalry surprised a large village of Sioux and Cheyenne on the Little Powder River in Montana, but Crazy Horse rallied the Indians and forced the troops to retreat. Again in late May, Crook moved north with 20 companies of men plus 300 friendly Shoshones and Crows, and once more, on June 17, on the Rosebud, he was defeated by a great array of warriors led by Crazy Horse. Retreating to his supply camp, Crook again decided to send for reinforcements.

Meanwhile, General Terry's command had marched west from Fort Abraham Lincoln and met Colonel Gibbon's detachment on the Yellowstone River. Again dividing his forces, Terry sent Custer and the entire Seventh Cavalry up the Rosebud River, while he and Gibbon, with 12 companies of infantry and four troops of cavalry, proceeded up the Bighorn River.

On the morning of June 25, 1876, Custer's scouts sighted the Indian village in the valley of the Little Bighorn. He divided his command to attack the village from three directions. The Indians, however, first met Maj. Marcus A. Reno's contingent of three troops in the afternoon in overwhelming numbers and forced them to retreat to a defensive position, where they were joined by a similar detachment under Capt. Frederick W. Benteen and the pack train. Meanwhile, the great part of the Indians had swung away to meet and wipe out Custer's personal command of five troops. Again the warriors attacked Reno, but since he was on favorable ground he was able to fight them off until the next day when their scouts detected the approach of General Terry. Firing the grass, the Indians moved off into the Bighorn Mountain, leaving over 260 soldiers dead on the battlefield. It was an empty victory, however, as the Indians were compelled to scatter to hunt for food. By winter, reinforced armies under General Crook and Colonel Miles had defeated bands led by Dull Knife and Crazy Horse, forcing them to return to the reservation and surrender, while Sitting Bull's band fled north into Canada.

In the meantime, the Government had decreed that no annuities should be paid to the hostile bands or to any Sioux until they had ceded the coveted Black Hills to the whites. A commission succeeded in getting the Sioux to sign an agreement effecting that end when it became law in February 1877.

The Northern Cheyennes were taken south to the Indian territory in 1877, but they broke away the next year, led by Dull Knife and Little Wolf, and headed north for their old home in the Dakotas.



In 1888, officers' row featured boardwalks, picket fences, and family gatherings on vine-shaded verandas. Courtesy Col. Louis Brechemin.

After hard campaigning by troops from Fort Laramie and other posts, many of Dull Knife's band were killed and all others were captured. These, however, were permitted to remain on the northern reservation.

The rush to the Black Hills gave new importance to Fort Laramie, for, with its bridge across the North Platte, it was the gateway to the gold-mining region via the trail leading north from Cheyenne, whose merchants advertised the route as being well guarded. Although the troops from the fort were virtually all engaged in the effort to combat Indian depredations and provide escorts, travel to the gold fields was in fact extremely hazardous. Regular service by the Cheyenne and Black Hills stage line was impossible, until conditions improved in the fall of 1876. But no sooner had Indian raids on the trail lessened than the activities of "road agents" threatened the traveler. Even armored coaches with shotgun guards failed to deter the bandits seeking gold shipments.

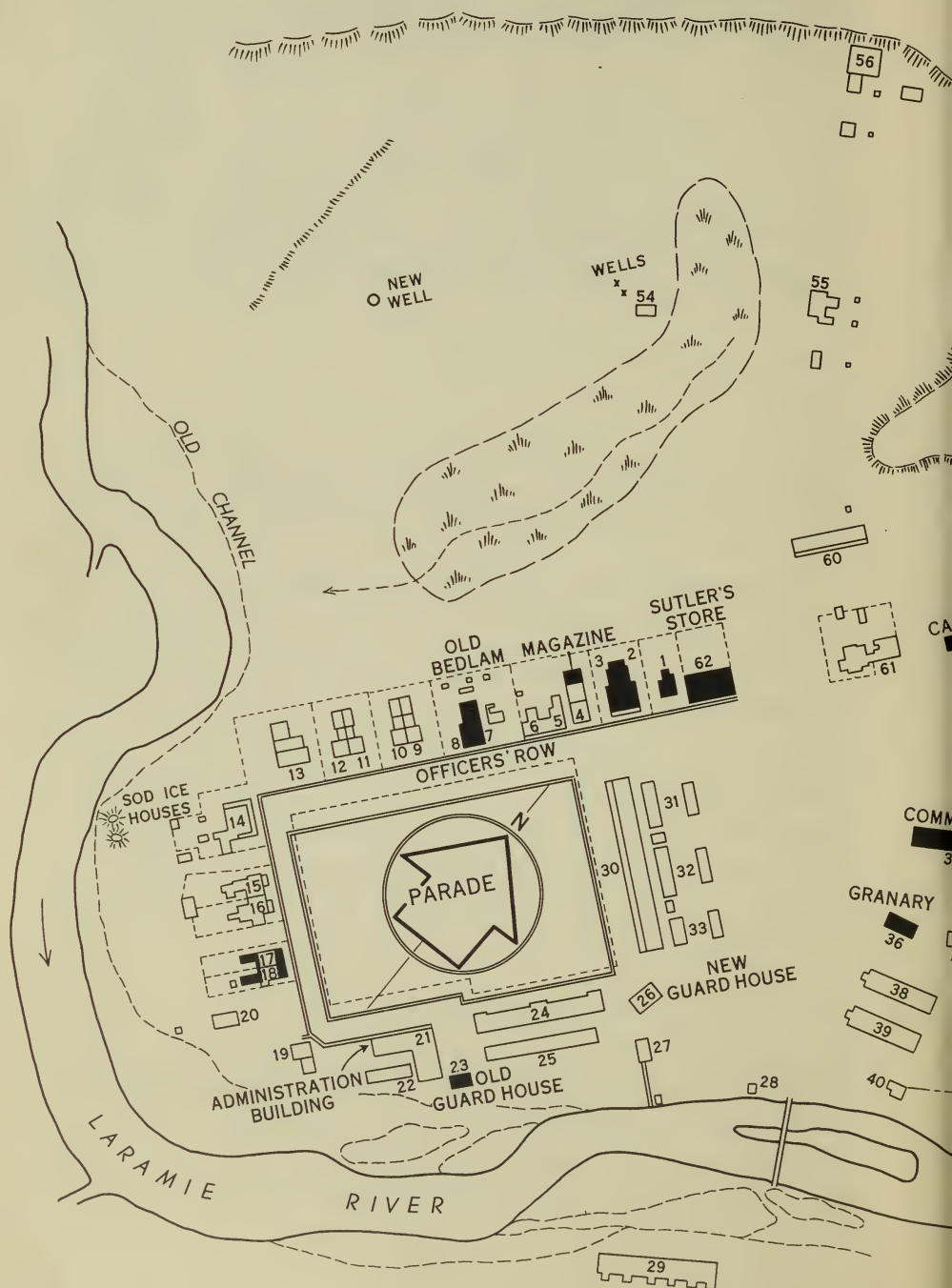
Last Years of the Army Post, 1877-90

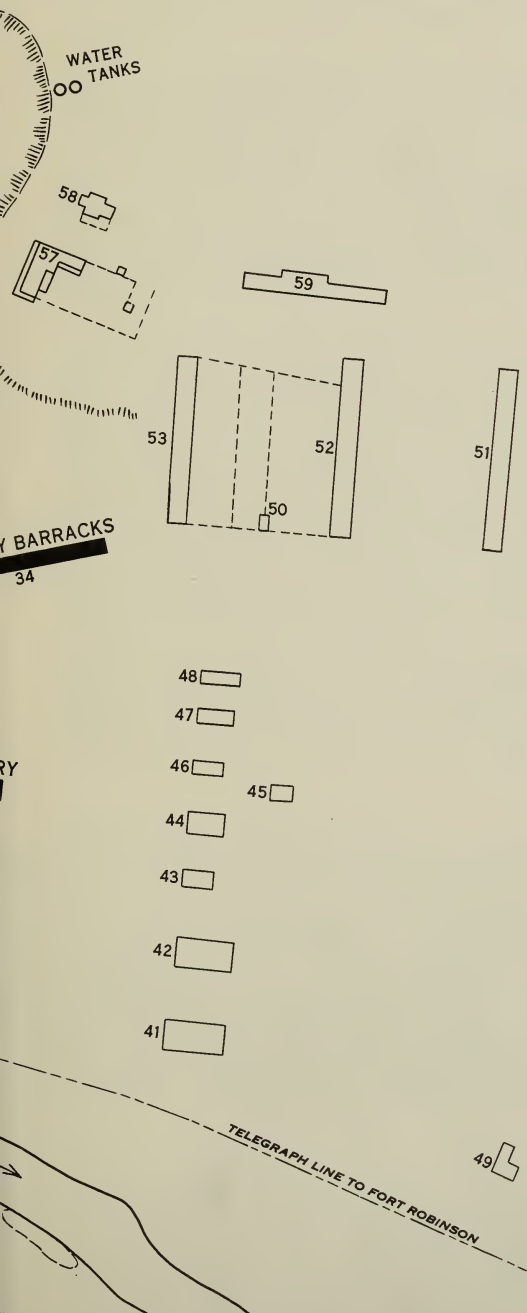
Beginning in the late 1870's, other changes took place around Fort Laramie. With the Indians removed to reservations, ranchers and other settlers came in, and great herds of cattle replaced the buffalo on the Wyoming plains. To many of these settlers the fort on the Laramie was a supply center, as well as insurance against Indian outbreaks and lawless white men.

FORT LARAMIE

PLAN OF POST

1888

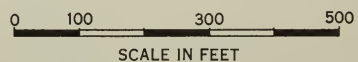




LEGEND

- | | |
|----|-------------------------------|
| 1 | OFFICERS' QUARTERS |
| 2 | " " |
| 3 | " " |
| 4 | " " |
| 5 | " " |
| 6 | " " |
| 7 | " " |
| 8 | " " |
| 9 | " " |
| 10 | " " |
| 11 | " " |
| 12 | " " |
| 13 | COMMANDING OFFICER'S QUARTERS |
| 14 | OFFICERS' QUARTERS |
| 15 | " " |
| 16 | " " |
| 17 | " " |
| 18 | " " |
| 19 | " " |
| 20 | PRINTING OFFICE |
| 21 | ADMINISTRATION BUILDING |
| 22 | LIBRARY |
| 23 | MAGAZINE (OLD GUARD HOUSE) |
| 24 | BARRACKS |
| 25 | KITCHEN AND MESSHALL |
| 26 | GUARD HOUSE |
| 27 | GENERAL SINK |
| 28 | OIL HOUSE |
| 29 | MARRIED MEN'S QUARTERS |
| 30 | BARRACKS |
| 31 | KITCHEN AND MESSHALL |
| 32 | " " " |
| 33 | " " " |
| 34 | NEW BARRACKS |
| 35 | COMMISSARY STORE HOUSE |
| 36 | GRANARY |
| 37 | BAKERY |
| 38 | Q.M. STORE HOUSE |
| 39 | Q.M. STORE HOUSE AND OFFICE |
| 40 | TELEGRAPH OFFICE |
| 41 | Q.M. STORE HOUSE |
| 42 | " " " |
| 43 | Q.M. SHOPS |
| 44 | " " |
| 45 | Q.M. EMPLOYEES' QUARTERS |
| 46 | Q.M. SHOPS |
| 47 | " " |
| 48 | " " |
| 49 | Q.M. EMPLOYEES' QUARTERS |
| 50 | HARNESS ROOM |
| 51 | STABLES |
| 52 | " " |
| 53 | " " |
| 54 | SAW MILL |
| 55 | RUSTIC HOTEL |
| 56 | STAGE COACH STABLES |
| 57 | HOSPITAL |
| 58 | HOSPITAL STEWARDS' QUARTERS |
| 59 | N.C. STAFF QUARTERS |
| 60 | BATH HOUSES |
| 61 | SUTLER'S RESIDENCE |
| 62 | SUTLER'S STORE |

BUILDINGS STANDING TODAY ARE SHOWN IN BLACK





Officers' row in the winter of 1889. Courtesy U. S. Signal Corps.

During these same years, Fort Laramie was assuming a false air of permanence as many of the old buildings of frame, log, and adobe construction were replaced by sturdy new structures with lime-concrete walls. A water system changed the parade ground from a gravelly flat to a tree-shaded greensward. The last cavalry unit to be stationed at the fort rode away in 1883 with Col. Wesley Merritt. Part of the Seventh Infantry, commanded by Colonel Gibbon, then garrisoned the post.

Fort Laramie's importance had been threatened by construction of the Union Pacific Railroad 100 miles to the south. Its fate was now sealed by construction, in the late 1880's, of the Northwestern Line 50 miles to the north. This made Fort Robinson the logical guardian of the Indian reservations to the north, and by 1886 Col. Henry Merriam, then commanding officer of the Seventh Infantry and Fort Laramie, was ready to agree that further development of the old post was unwise. Not until August 31, 1889, however, was abandonment of the proud old fort decreed. At the request of Wyoming's Governor Warren, troops remained at the post until March 2, 1890, when the last two companies of the Seventh Infantry marched away. A few men were left to ship movable property, while a detachment from Fort

General view of Fort Laramie in 1889.



Robinson dismantled some of the structures and on April 9, 1890, auctioned off the buildings and fixtures. At that auction, Lt. C. M. Taylor of the Ninth Cavalry sold the buildings of historic Fort Laramie at prices ranging from \$2.50 to \$100. Thirty-five lots of buildings and much miscellaneous furniture and fixtures brought a total of \$1,395.

The Homesteaders Take Over

In June 1890, the military reservation of some 35,000 acres was turned over to the Department of the Interior and opened to homesteading. John Hunton was appointed custodian of the abandoned military reservation for the General Land Office. He first came to Fort Laramie in 1867 to work for the sutler. Later, he became a ranch operator, and in 1888 he succeeded John London as post trader. Hunton was a major buyer at the final auction and managed to homestead the northwest side of the old parade grounds of the fort, continuing to operate the sutler's store briefly, and living next door in the former officers' quarters for nearly 30 years.

Another of the major purchasers at the auction was one Joe Wilde, who also homesteaded part of the fort grounds, including the commissary storehouse and the cavalry barracks. He converted the buildings into a combination hotel, dance hall, and saloon and operated them as a social center for North Platte Valley residents for over 25 years. The west end of the parade grounds and the site of the old adobe trading post which the Army had demolished in 1862 was homesteaded by the widow of Thomas Sandercock, a civilian engineer at the fort, who made her home in the officers' quarters which had been built in 1870.

A dozen or more buildings used by these civilian owners were preserved with some alterations; but the bulk of the buildings were soon dismantled for lumber by their purchasers, and the old fort became a part of many a ranch home, homestead shack, or barn.

Courtesy U. S. Signal Corp.



STAGE COACH
STABLES

SAW MILL
RUSTIC HOTEL

HOSPITAL
N.C.O. QUARTERS



ENTRANCE ROAD

OLD BEDLAM
OFFICERS' QUARTERS

OFFICERS' QUARTERS
MAGAZINE

STUTLER'S
STORE

PARADE

BARACKS

MESSEHALL

MESSEHALL

NEW GUARD HOUSE

OLD GUARD HOUSE

OLD MESS

OFFICERS' QUARTERS

ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

GUARD HOUSE

BARACKS

OLD GUARD HOUSE

NEW GUARD HOUSE

OLD GUARD HOUSE

NEW GUARD HOUSE

OLD GUARD HOUSE

NEW GUARD HOUSE

OLD GUARD HOUSE

NEW GUARD HOUSE

OFFICE AND MUSEUM
(CAVALRY BARRACKS)

PARKING

COMMISSARY STORE HOUSE

NEW BAKERY

OLD BAKERY

NEW BAKERY

OLD BAKERY

NEW BAKERY

OLD BAKERY

NEW BAKERY

OLD BAKERY

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NEW BAKERY

OLD BAKERY

A GUIDE TO FORT LARAMIE NATIONAL MONUMENT WYOMING

TOUR ROUTE
BUILDING
RUIN
SITE
STOPS ON TOUR

0 100 300 500
SCALE IN FEET

Efforts to Preserve the Fort

John Hunton and a few other citizens recognized the historic importance of the old fort and expressed regret at its decay. In 1913, despairing anything better, they erected a monument commemorating its long service as a military post on the Oregon Trail.

Lands and buildings changed hands. Absentee landlords, tenants, and souvenir hunters contributed much to the destruction of the historic buildings and to the scattering of priceless relics. Creation of the Wyoming Historical Landmark Commission in 1927 initiated efforts to achieve public ownership and to protect this historic site. Ten years later the State of Wyoming appropriated funds for the purchase and donation to the Federal Government of 214 acres of land, including the surviving buildings. By Presidential proclamation, this became Fort Laramie National Monument on July 16, 1938, under the administration of the National Park Service of the United States Department of the Interior.

Guide to the Area

At Fort Laramie, the National Park Service is endeavoring to preserve the surviving features of the military period and, after exhaustive research, to restore standing buildings and related portions of the grounds to their appearance around 1888. Certain of the older structures provide glimpses of the fort scene as early as 1849.

The numbers in the following guide section correspond to numbers on the guide map.

1. CAVALRY BARRACKS—INFORMATION CENTER. It is suggested that you stop first at the Information Center in the former cavalry barracks. Here information and free literature are provided and a variety of publications are on sale. Some exhibits will aid you to visualize the appearance and significance of the fort at various periods in its long career. The structure is also being utilized temporarily for National Park Service headquarters, utility shops, and residential units.

The cavalry barracks, as originally constructed in 1875, provided quarters, kitchens, messhalls, washrooms, reading rooms, and other facilities for two 60-man units of troops.

2. THE SUTLER'S STORE. Walking 100 yards southwest, past a commemorative monument and the site of the sutler's residence, you reach the sutler's store. Erected in 1849 or early 1850, the adobe section of this structure housed a general store. The stone section was added about 1852 and used in part as quarters for the sutler. During the



The sutler's store in 1875. Courtesy University of Wyoming Archives and Western History Department.

next three decades, many other additions were made, all of which had disappeared by 1883. At that time, the present lime-concrete section was constructed. This addition housed the officers' club, storage rooms, and a public saloon which connected with a poolroom in part of the stone section. The balance of the stone section then housed the sutler's office and the post office connecting with the original general store. Operated by the sutler, or post trader as he was officially known after 1867, under a permit from the War Department, this versatile institution served many notable western travelers, residents, and warriors—both red and white—during its 40 active years.

3. OFFICERS' QUARTERS. With mansard roof and lime-concrete walls, there stands next to the sutler's store the last officers' quarters erected

"Old Bedlam" in 1875. Courtesy H. C. Bretney.





The sutler's store and officers' row, 1954.

at Fort Laramie in 1884. After the abandonment of the fort, it became the home of the last post trader, John Hunton.

4. OFFICERS' QUARTERS. Next in "Officers' Row" stands a lime-concrete walled duplex. Erected during the building boom at Fort Laramie in 1875-76, it is typical of the officers' quarters of that day.

5. SITE OF BARRACKS. Turning your back to "Officers' Row," you see the stone foundations of a long, three-company barracks erected in 1868 which faced one end of the historic parade ground, and had behind it messhalls and kitchens for each company.

"Old Bedlam" in 1889. Courtesy E. A. Brininstool.





"Old Bedlam" in 1938, prior to restoration.

6. MAGAZINE. To the rear of "Officers' Row" stands a rough stone-walled structure originally built by 1850 as post magazine. In later years it served as an outbuilding under several types of roofs.

7. "OLD BEDLAM." Passing the sites of missing units of "Officers' Row," you reach this two-storied frame structure which has dominated the scene since the late summer of 1849, when it was partially completed of lumber sawed locally by horsepower and millwork hauled overland from Fort Leavenworth. While post headquarters—home of the commanding officer until 1867 and often the stronghold of bachelor officers—countless notables, including soldier, civilian, and Indian sat at its dinner and council tables. It has been intimately associated with many historic events, among the most dramatic of which was John "Portugee" Phillips' 236-mile, 4-day ride through December blizzards with the news of the Fetterman disaster at Fort Phil Kearny in 1866. Its brick-filled, clapboard walls echoing to historic tumult and social gaiety, it early acquired the name "Old Bedlam," which was immortalized in Gen. Charles King's novel *Laramie, or the Queen*

Officers and children in front of now-missing units of officers' row, about 1889. Courtesy Gen. G. W. McIver.



The cast of an amateur tableau in 1889 featured Col. H. C. Merriam, the commanding officer. Courtesy Col. Louis Brechemin.



of *Bedlam*, first published in 1889. As originally constructed, it had side wings and outside stairways. These were removed and the present rear wing added in 1881.

8. OFFICERS' QUARTERS RUINS. Three sets of crumbling lime-concrete walls are all that remain of two commodious duplexes and a spacious veranda-rimmed mansion for the commanding officer, which were erected in 1881. They are stark reminders of the dismantling of many fine buildings for lumber after the public auction of 1890.

9. SITE OF FORT JOHN. Turning the corner of the parade ground by the remains of a small brick fountain and passing the site of another now-missing officers' quarters, you reach the site of the fort built in 1841 by the American Fur Co. Located on high ground in a bend of the Laramie River, it dominated the then treeless valley from bluff to bluff. Many historians believe this was also the site of log-stockaded Fort William, erected in 1834, but conclusive evidence as to its location is lacking.

Guard mount, about 1885, facing officers' quarters, now in ruins. Courtesy Wyoming Historical Department.



10. OFFICERS' QUARTERS Occupying part of the site of Fort John is a large frame building used as officers' quarters and built in 1870. Originally designed for one family, it was later divided into a duplex with two kitchen wings and verandas on three sides.

11. ADMINISTRATION BUILDING RUINS. Turning the far corner of the parade ground where once stood several minor buildings, including a printing office, you reach the ruins of the fine administration building erected in 1885 to house not only the headquarters offices but the post theater and a schoolroom for officers' children.

12. OLD GUARDHOUSE. Facing the shallow stream, which is all that modern irrigation reservoirs have left of the rushing Laramie River, are the stone walls and barred windows and doors of the guardhouse, or prison, built in 1866. The upper floor was used largely by the post guard contingent, while prisoners, regardless of the degree of their offense, languished in the basement room where remains of a solitary cell suggests the probable harshness of military penal discipline. Bricked-up windows and doorway are evidences of later use of this structure for ordnance storage.

13. SITE OF BARRACKS. The long, low mound on the southeast side of the parade ground marks the site of another two-company barracks behind which were kitchens and messhalls. These also were built in 1866.

14. NEW GUARDHOUSE RUINS. At the east angle of the parade ground stands the walls of a guardhouse erected in 1876 to improve the lot of

Barracks for five companies and the new guardhouse viewed across the parade grounds about 1889. Courtesy U. S. Signal Corps.





The administration building at Fort Laramie shortly after its completion in 1885. Courtesy U. S. Signal Corps.

both guards and prisoners. To the right are the foundations of the general sink, and, to the left, the barracks foundations described under No. 5.

15. OLD BAKERY. One hundred yards to the east, this brick and lime-concrete structure, built in 1876 to replace an earlier bakehouse, has been restored to its condition as a granary, the use to which it was put after 1885 when a new bakery, now in ruin to the east, was constructed.

16. COMMISSARY STOREHOUSE. This large, lime-concrete walled structure was erected in 1883 and included offices, issue rooms, and store-rooms for the variety of clothing, foodstuffs, and supplies controlled by

The restored commissary-storehouse, the old bakery, and ruined new bakery, 1954.



the commissary. In one large section of this structure are displayed vehicles, implements, stoves, and furnishings, either relics of the fort or acquisitions for eventual refurbishing of certain of the historic structures.

You have now returned to the parking area and Information Center, but may continue your tour to additional sites.

17. HOSPITAL RUINS. On the hill to the north stand the ruins of the post hospital erected in 1873. The hospital contained a 12-bed ward, dispensary, kitchen, dining room, isolation rooms, surgeon's office, rooms for orderlies and storage, but no laboratory or operating rooms. It was the first lime-concrete building erected at Fort Laramie. There is good evidence that this building stands in the midst of the cemetery used by the fur traders before 1849 and by the Army before 1868. These early burials, probably including that of Milton Sublette in 1836, remain undisturbed.

18. NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICERS' QUARTERS RUIN. East of the hospital is the ruin of a long, one-story building. Built in 1884, it consisted of six four-room apartments for married noncommissioned staff officers.

Looking west from "Hospital Hill," you may gaze down on the sites of the Cheyenne-Black Hills Stage Co.'s stables and the Rustic Hotel, another of the post trader's enterprises during the Black Hills rush. Farther west stand the ruined walls of a sawmill-pumphouse erected in 1887 to replace a predecessor destroyed by fire.

OTHER POINTS OF INTEREST. Outside the present boundaries of the national monument, but closely related to the historic fort, are several other points of interest.

A view of Fort Laramie, 1954.





The cavalry barracks, 1954, partially restored.

When approaching the fort, the visitor crosses the North Platte River on a picturesque iron truss bridge which was built by the Army in 1875-76 with materials hauled by ox team from Cheyenne. A short distance above the bridge, on the south bank of the river, is the site of old Fort Platte, rival of the second Fort Laramie (Fort John). Farther on, to the left of the road, is a modern cemetery which includes a few marked burials of soldiers and civilians of the late military period. The remains of enlisted men once buried here, along with remains of soldiers slain in the Grattan massacre, have been removed to Fort McPherson National Cemetery in Nebraska.

Just beyond the boundary fence to the northeast, adjoining the cavalry barracks and commissary storehouse, once stood numerous



utility shops, stables, corrals, the Indian agent's office, and the telegraph office. On the opposite side of Laramie River were other structures associated with the fort, including a laundresses' quarters and the Brown's Hotel.

In historic times there were various bridges across the Laramie for the accommodation of soldiers and civilian travelers. The abutments of one of these may still be seen to the east of the old bakery.

How to Reach Fort Laramie

Fort Laramie National Monument is on a paved country road 3 miles southwest of the town of Fort Laramie, Wyo., which is on U. S. 26 midway between its junctions with U. S. 85 and 87.

The Burlington Railroad and Bus Lines offer service to the town of Fort Laramie, but there is no public transportation between the town and the monument. You must arrange your own transportation between these points.

Administration

Fort Laramie National Monument is administered by the National Park Service of the United States Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Fort Laramie, Wyo., is in immediate charge.

Related Areas

Included in the National Park System are many other important areas connected with various periods in American history. In addition to Fort Laramie National Monument, those commemorating related phases of Western history include: Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, Mo.; Homestead and Scotts Bluff National Monuments, Nebr.; Custer Battlefield and Big Hole Battlefield National Monuments, Mont.; Grand Teton National Park, Wyo.; Whitman National Monument, Wash.; Lava Beds National Monument, Calif.; Pipe Spring National Monument, Ariz.; and McLoughlin House National Historic Site, Oreg.

Facilities

Fort Laramie National Monument has no facilities for camping parties. Trailer parks, motels, hotel accommodations, and restaurants

may be found in the nearby towns of Torrington, Lingle, Fort Laramie, and Guernsey.

The area is open the entire year. Historical information and literature are available at the administrative office and museum, which is open every day during the summer. Special interpretive service is available to groups making prior arrangements with the superintendent.

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